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Spice Girl

Designer Carrie Ellington outfits her Minneapolis cottage like she puts together her wardrobe: Sweet feminine pinks, sparkles, and ruffles tempered with edge—jet black, animal prints, and plenty of sassy attitude.

by Candace Ord Manroe

Photographs by Spacecrafting

A Baker mirror above the fireplace points to designer Carrie Ellington's appreciation for quality, though she insists "a mix of high and low is essential—nobody can be all high." Her black-and-white palette is a timeless graphic look. Her idea of a good mix includes pieces like the weathered Dovetail coffee table and overdyed vintage Turkish rug. "You don't want everything looking like it's from one source," she says. The oil painting above the sofa, a traditional element amid a sea of white contemporary pieces, has traveled with the designer from home to home, room to room.

When Carrie Ellington launched her design business in 2018, after 16 years working as senior designer for another Twin Cities firm, she announced it on Instagram with a photo of her feet bedecked in a strappy black stacked heels and a gray striped crew socks brandishing one single word: "REBEL." It's hard to imagine a better distillation of Ellington's confident style, equal parts sensuality and wit.

"Where some players might just stay in the safe zone, I'm confident enough to push for something more unexpected if I feel it matters to the overall design. I think being rebellious is essential to create something that hasn't already been done," she says. That philosophy applies to her own appearance. She'd always wanted a nose ring. "I was over 50 when I finally just did it. It's never too late!"

In her 1942 Minneapolis cottage, the overlap between her fashion and interior-design sensibilities becomes obvious. "My home's palette is basically white. The one thing I did before moving in was paint all the walls white. Then I painted the windows black, to pop. My fashion style is similar. I wear neutrals, especially whites, and animal prints." (The animal-print pillows on her living room sofa are a favorite.) "I love wearing hip frayed jeans and Converses. In my living room, those translate to a weathered wood coffee table and faded vintage Turkish rug."

Sensuality flows from footwear to housewares. The bedroom's feather chandelier and sheepskin rug are decadently textural; art—the inked-up iconic photos of Liz Taylor above the bed and James Dean in the entry—dazzles and surprises. Bar carts anticipate friends' needs.

Relationships, especially love for her late mother, are honored through design. The splashy pomegranate curtains in her office, which she'd originally sourced for her mom's kitchen, embody one of her mother's last requests. "She wanted me to have them, and I wanted her to see them installed before she died. They fit perfectly."

Love for her fur baby, wheaten terrier Vivian, joins with a special memory of her mom in the master bedroom's green John Deere dog bed. "We found it at a tractor supply store in Mankato when we were buying birdseed. My mom bought it for Vivian to use at her house."

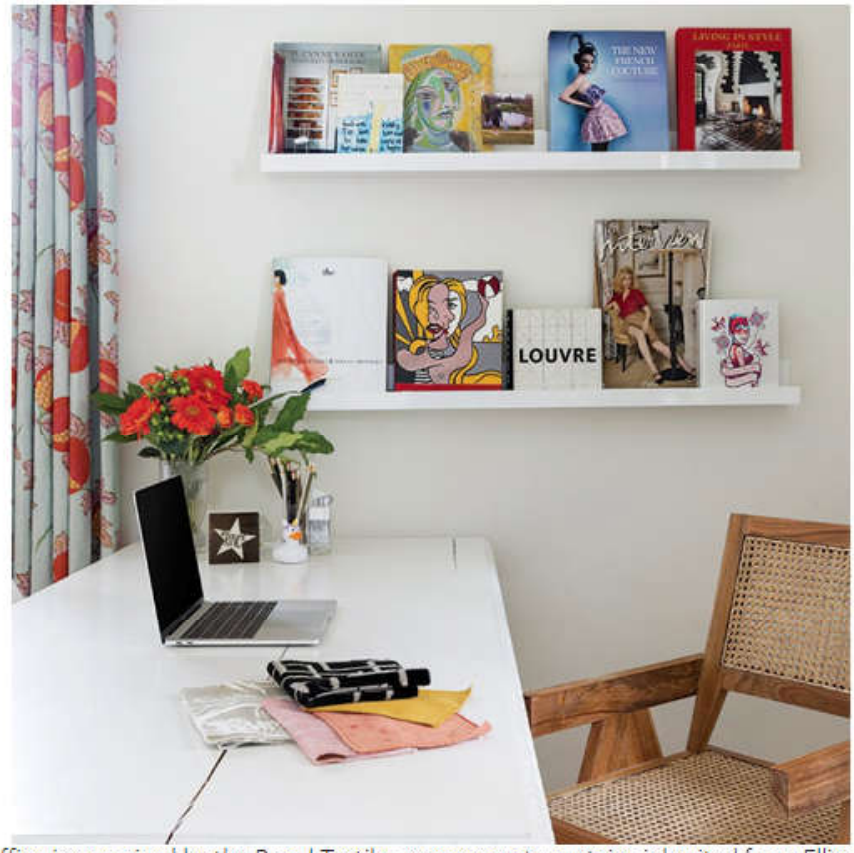
The cottage also pays homage to travel, a passion proven by her well-stamped passport. The Herbariae wallpaper by French designer Christian Lacroix "reminds me of Paris every time I'm in the kitchen." Art behind her office desk hails from Cuba, a favorite destination with its "food, architecture, art, people, cars, mojitos." Furniture ranges from Baker to Target, much like her fashion spans high and low. "A Birkin bag is portable art, so if I were given one, I would carry it. Otherwise, I'd rather spend my money going to Singapore or Bali or someplace on my bucket list." Her home is the mirror that reflects her image, the ultimate tell of good design.

Ellington's personal style is announced in the entry of her 1942 Minneapolis cottage, where a James Dean photo inked up by artist Cheyenne Randall hangs above Knoll's iconic martini chair, which abuts Baker's Ming sideboard.

The Lucite bar cart in the dining room is stocked with a variety of waters and mixers for guests' convenience. "Especially in a small house like this, friends know where to go and can help themselves. I've had one in every house I've owned. Even if you're not using it for booze, a bar cart is great. I've set them up for clients with kids who are too small to reach cabinets. They can get their own cereal bowls and lunch plates."

The kitchen table is from CB2, and the chairs are Target finds. The high-end French designer wallpaper is an unexpected touch that reflects Ellington's fashion sense. The glass chandelier from Filament Lighting & Home amps up the eclectic vibe paired with the modern tulip-style table and black-framed caned chairs in the dining room.

A guest room turned office is energized by the Raoul Textiles pomegranate curtains inherited from Ellington's late mother. The "Portuguese Desk" from Noir was a must-have. The pair of chairs are knockoffs from Target. A Lucite magazine holder from The Container Store caddies inspiration, as do the bookshelves on the wall by the desk. Carrie Ellington and her wheaten terrier Vivian are BFFs: "She's welcome on all the white furniture!" Ellington's edgy style and vibrant spirit complement her newest role as MiMi to her grandson, Henry.



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The Grace & Blake light fixture from Filament Lighting & Home was a gift from a friend. "I grew up on a farm (actually, we still own it), and every time I lie in bed and look up at the feather light fixture and see the chicken-coop wire it's made from, I'm reminded of my childhood." The tattooed Liz Taylor art behind the bed, also a gift, is by artist Cheyenne Randall. Ellington's mother bought the green John Deere dog bed for Vivian.

Interior Design: Carrie Ellington, Ellington & Co. Design, 612-578-6833, ellingtonandcodesign.com

by Candace Ord Manroe
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